

Meeting Note: Policy Forum 15th March 2022

Attendees:

Jane Banks SC (Staff & Chair)
Ryan Mercer SC (Staff)
Sarah Beacock NI
Florence Bullough GSL
Lorenzo Casarosa IMarEST
Elizabeth Chamberlain IOP
Sean Edmunds IPEM
Frances Evans ASE
Stephen French IFST
Sarah Garry BSS

Nicky King SNS
Joseph Lewis IES
Robert Massey RAS
Arthur Nicholas IST
Caren Reid ASPIH
Tanya Sheridan RSC
Andy Smith BASES
Rachel Stonehouse IOM3

Guests:

Jon Broderick RSC
Alessandro Coatti RSB
Megan O'Donnell GSL

Apologies:

Gavin Blackett ORS
Laura Marshall RSB
David Wells IBMS

1) Welcome

- **Jane Banks** opened the meeting.
 - Noted that the Policy Advisory Committee has been formed and has held its first meeting (See Annex).

2) Current Consultations

House of Lords Science and Technology Committee call for evidence

- **Ryan Mercer** explained that the Science Council will be responding to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee call for evidence on a science and technology strategy (also known as the “science superpower” consultation). This will be a response in the Science Council’s name only, not one actively co-signed by member organisations given time constraints. The content of the response is being drawn from the previous Science Council engagements with Government which had significant buy-in from member organisations.

- The key points of the Science Council submission are that for the UK to become a 'science superpower' the following pre-requisites need to be met:
 - A level of R&D funding competitive with other leading scientific nations to enable science and innovation to play a leading role in driving economic growth.
 - Ensuring the highest professional standards are upheld for UK science with scientists valued as trusted professionals.
 - Scientists embedded in public policy making across Government, valued for their expertise as economists and social scientists are.
 - An education and skills ecosystem to both ensure a strong skills pipeline and build public trust in science.
- The **RSC**, **RSB** and **IOP** are also responding to this consultation.
- Policy Forum members recommended the Science Council reflect the following points in its response:
 - The UK's science ecosystem should be fostering collaboration, breaking down disciplinary boundaries and building confidence for the long-term.
 - It is important to highlight increasing the diversity of the scientific workforce as a priority for any national science strategy.
 - Supporting international collaboration and most especially maintaining the UK's association with Horizon Europe.
 - Funding should be balanced between discovery, applied science and developmental.
 - Open science, data sharing and online access to journals would strengthen the science ecosystem.

Department of Health and Social Care – Healthcare regulation consultation

- **Sean Edmunds** noted that **IPEM** are responding to this consultation, noting that they believe the door is potentially open for statutory regulation of clinic technologists in line with patient safety regulations.

3) Science Council Climate Conference

- **Ryan Mercer** informed the Policy Forum that the Science Council will be holding its Climate Conference on **Thursday 29th September 2022**.
 - The conference is to be held at the IoP, who have generously offered to host the event for up to 160 participants.
- The conference will focus on the reality that while there is consensus on the need for the UK to take action achieve net-zero carbon emissions, there are a range of perspectives amongst our community of organisations on the pathway to achieving this and that as a community it is important to maturely discuss these perspectives.

- The Science Council intends for this to be an event designed in collaboration with member organisations, with member organisations invited to hold workshop sessions sharing their expertise and research on different aspects of the challenges.
- Policy forum members made the following points in discussion:
 - It could be beneficial and engaging to bring together experts from overlapping by distinct disciplines for parts of the discussion.
 - It is important to be careful in how we communicate that while there isn't consensus on means, that there is consensus on the science of climate change.
 - There could be value in producing an educational resource following the conference for politicians and others to communicate the policy choices that the country faces.
 - Workshop topics suggested include energy security and the future of food systems.
- Ryan Mercer will be in contact with various policy forum members over the coming weeks to gain further input on the design of the conference, including the member run workshops.

4) Implications of Ukraine conflict for science policy

Context

- The Ukrainian Government and Science Academy wrote a letter to the science communities of western countries, calling for the following sanctions to be placed on Russia:
 - Block access to scientometric databases and materials of scientific publishes.
 - Make it impossible for institutions and affiliated scientists to participate in international grant programmes.
 - Suspend students, researchers, and institutions from academic mobility programmes.
 - Boycott any international scientific events held in Russia.
 - Suspend indexing of scientific publications published in Russia to all scientometric databases.
 - "To make It impossible to publish the scientific heritage of Russian scientists in the conditions of their affiliation in Russian scientific or educational institutions"
 - To stop serving the existing equipment for scientific research and the supply of new equipment.
- The Science Council's policy events programme was to include a discussion on the benefits/risks of international collaboration in science.

- This was a live topic given the UK Government's recent initiatives in this area such as the BEIS's Research Collaboration Advice Team and Cabinet Office's Trusted Research campaign.
- It now takes on an additional salience given the situation in Russia, and should now perhaps consider the responsibilities we have to consider when engaging with autocratic regimes vs the benefits of science diplomacy.

Discussion

- A number of member organisations have put out statements focused on humanitarian crisis and message of support for scientists.
- Overall mood is that large scale collaboration should not continue despite occasional disappointment on how this impacts on specific research projects.
- Significant steps at ending any collaboration have been taken already, notably ties with Roscosmos have been largely ended apart from the International Space Station, with ongoing debate about what happens with that going forward.
- Ukraine's letter constitutes an appeal to action, with one member noting that it's very hard to read the appeal for action and forget about it.
 - Some of the actions are questionable, but we need to be clear about why or why not we're acting as we may well meet Ukrainian scientists at future conferences and should be able to justify our decision to them.
 - It was noted that it was an open letter, rather than a letter directly to any of our organisations, but it is clear the Ukrainian authors intended us to read it.
- There was significant discussion on the Individuals and institutions:
 - There is a distinction between being Russian and representing Russia.
 - Any collaboration with Russian institutions risks collaboration with the Russian Government.
 - Any sanctions on institutions will significantly impact on individual scientists.
 - Separate collaboration with individuals could actually put them at risk inadvertently given the scale of state surveillance in Russia.
 - Allowing scientists and engineers to move from Russia to the west could be a sanction in of itself (brain drain), supporting the individuals while undermining institutions.
- In terms of supporting individual academics:
 - The **Royal Astronomical Society** is working with CARA (the Council for At-Risk Academics) on ways to can support scientists from all conflict zones
 - While we may wish to support Russian scientists who have criticised Putin and the war in Ukraine, although current sanctions on travel and no foreign currency access may prevent this.

Potential steps forward

- Anything we say or do should be reviewed regularly based on changing circumstances as this is a rapidly evolving situation.

- There could be value in exploring historical precedents for what kind of science-based sanctions work, such as with apartheid South Africa.
- Could we engage with dissident Russian/Ukrainian academics who are already in the UK to hear their views and consider what levers might be effective?
- While we could not reasonably have foreseen or planned for what has happened in the Ukraine, there are potential future issues relating to this we can plan for, such as:
 - How can we support reconstruction after the war, including the rebuilding of Ukraine's science infrastructure?
 - Can support we provide science education and support for those students, including refugees who have had their education disrupted?
- The Science Council's planned international evening discussion should go ahead given it has become even more relevant, but we may wish to consider how we bring in Russian/Ukrainian voices into the discussion.

Ryan Mercer, Policy Officer